

Have Someone Else's Will As Your Own by cricket_aria

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Summary:

Eddie wasn't the type of person who tried listening in on other people's conversation, but it's hard to avoid when one of his coworkers is practically shouting about how much he liked some new comic he'd seen.

He wasn't the type to visit comedy clubs either, but somehow the name Rich Tozier just wouldn't get out of his head.

1. Read the Signs Carefully

Eddie wasn't the type who tried listening in on other people's conversations at work. Partly because he just wanted to get his shit done and never get pulled into any stupid office drama, mostly because the less casual talk he engaged with the less likely he was to ever snap at something ridiculous he heard. So far he'd successfully avoided giving anyone at the office cause to think he was an angry little shit, and since it was the first place he'd worked that really felt like it was becoming a career instead of just a stopping ground on his search for one he really wanted to keep it that way.

He *tried* not to listen in but sometimes they did not make it easy for him. That was why at 3PM on a Friday he was trying to remember whether the first aid kit he kept in his desk contained a pair of earplugs, and decide how his boss was likely to react if she caught him wearing them, because the man talking at the next desk was practically shouting and Eddie did not want to deal with it.

He didn't even recognize the guy, although he must just be from a different department since no one seemed bothered by his presence. In fact, a few others had gathered around too, to hear him pontificating about some sleazy (Eddie assumed, he didn't seem like the type to visit upscale spots) comedy club he insisted everyone needed to try to get to. "I'm tellin' you, you've all *gotta* check out this guest comic they've got in this week. The bastard's gonna be *huge*, I guarantee it, one day you'll wanna say you got to see him while he was just starting out." He smacked the desk hard as emphasis, making Eddie jump in his seat though luckily no one seemed to notice. "I gotta sense for this. Remember when I said that weaselly-faced guy had the chops to make it on Saturday Night Live some day? And who started showing up last season?"

"We still don't think that was really Seth Meyers you saw, man," Bob, the main target of this man's rambling, cut it. "Dude's not all that weaselly-looking for that to be your main memory of him."

"Yeah, you wait until I find that ticket some day, then we'll see who's laughing. The wife's gotta have it shoved in a scrapbook somewhere, she doesn't get rid of that sorta shit." There was a round of

disbelieving laughter and Eddie glanced over to see the man glaring around his little crowd, before he softened into a laugh himself. “Anyway, seriously, this guy had some good shit and I figured I’d let people know they should check him out before he leaves town. Name’s Rick... no, Rich. Rich Tossy... Tosser—”

“Tozier,” Eddie absently cut in.

The man snapped his fingers, not even glancing around to see who was talking. “Yeah, that’s it! Rich Tozier, funny as shit!”

There was a part of Eddie that hoped that another member of the little cluster might look over with some new respect, or interest, or *something*, and comment about how they wouldn’t have guessed that he was the type of person to be into stand-up, but he wasn’t really surprised when it didn’t happen. He’d successfully kept anyone from thinking he was secretly a bucket full of rage, but as a side effect they didn’t think much about him at all.

Not that he’d have known how to respond if they had commented on it, because Eddie had *no idea* where that name had come from. He must have overheard it somewhere, but he couldn’t have said when. It had just slid off his tongue out of nowhere at the thought of a comic name Rich Tos-something, along with the weirdest sense of satisfaction when the name was confirmed.

Why the hell was that something he’d even care about?

He told himself for the rest of the work day that he *didn’t* care about that overheard conversation. He wasn’t the type of person who went to stand-up shows. He definitely wasn’t the type of person who went to clubs that he hadn’t vetted first for any recorded health code violations, and preferably had time to do a first visit to during off-hours when they’d be bright and empty enough for him to spot any obvious safety issues. And he did *not* go out to do anything remotely unusual without having planned the occasion at least three weeks in advance. Edward Kaspbrak was not a man who ran on impulse.

So he was pretty surprised by himself when at the end of the day, after he packed up his things and clocked out the way he usually did,

he found himself standing by side of the street trying to hail a cab instead of making his way towards his usual subway station. It was something he'd do more often if he could afford to, avoiding the cesspit of germs that came with cramming so many people together, but he couldn't even try to tell himself he was just taking it as a treat when the first words out of his mouth were "Do you know where The Laugh Hole is?"

The cabbie glanced back at him with a raised eyebrow at the lack of any sort of greeting, or maybe at a man in a suit and tie wanting to be taken straight to a place with a name like that, but after a second he nodded. "Yeah, I do. Name that bad sticks in your head. You want me to take you somewhere to change first?" he glanced at the dashboard clock then back at Eddie, "I can tell you right now, buddy, we'll be making it there a good while before anything interesting starts up."

"No," Eddie told him, trying to be firm. "We'll head straight there," and thankfully the driver just shrugged and pulled away from the curb without any more discussion. Eddie knew himself well enough to know that if he went home first he would never make it at all. If he didn't just give up on the idea himself once he was in the dull familiarity of his apartment, an environment not designed to nurture flights of fancy, then he'd answer his girlfriend's customary after work phone call and as soon as Myra heard that he planned to go back out she'd begin 'But why'ing the idea straight out of him. Even if he tried not to tell her she had an unerring sense for when he was trying to keep something from her, and would get it out of him in the end.

(One of the rare bursts of curiosity various coworkers had shown about him was wondering why he still hadn't gotten a cellphone, and while he'd always say something about waiting until they'd been common long enough for accurate studies on any possible dangers to them, truthfully he just knew somewhere deep down that the minute Myra had 24-7 access to him that would be it. He'd never be able to do anything just for himself again.)

The club turned out to be close enough that he could have have walked it if he'd just looked up the location before leaving work, but he could afford the short ride there so he tried not to think of it as a

waste of money and tipped the cabbie well. When he glanced at the sign by the door he realized that the driver had been telling the truth about his timing, the club was open for drinks but the first set wasn't supposed to start for almost an hour and a half and Tozier wasn't even the first act. For a second he considered trying to see if there was anywhere close by that he could at least buy a polo, he could probably fit his shirt and jacket in his briefcase if needed, but once again he decided against doing anything that would give him a chance to talk himself out of going and walked in.

"Hey," the girl checking IDs at the door, Alicia by her nametag, said as she took his cover. She was a tiny thing who didn't even look old enough to get in herself, but her bare arms revealed muscles like rocks to show everyone why she'd be trusted to play bouncer. "Fresh blood?"

"That, uh, obvious?" Eddie asked, glancing past her into the sparse crowd to see if he really stood out that much.

"Well, you are a little overdressed for this place," she said with an easy smile. "Okay, quick newbie rundown. We do have a coat check if you want to get out of that jacket, they can take your briefcase too. Just head to the right when you get in the door. Tables are first-come, first-serve if you're planning to stay for the show and didn't just stop in the first place you saw that served drinks after leaving work; getting here this early means you pretty much have your choice. Servers will start making their rounds when it's closer to showtime, until then you've got to head to the bar yourself if you want to order anything. And... here, you look like the type who'd want this." She reached under a nearby counter and produced a large red candle that she handed to him.

Eddie blinked at it in confusion. "Thank you? It's a very nice, weird, door gift, but it doesn't have any artificial fragrance to it does it? I have a sensitivity to most perfumes."

"It's not a *gift*. Red means stop," she said as if that should mean something, and when no light dawned for him she sighed and tapped the side of it. "It's a sign to the comics not to pull you into any jokes unless you start heckling them first. We're too small for 'don't sit too close to the stage' to be useful, so the boss came up with a different

flag and makes sure everyone who gets on our stage knows it. You don't have to take it if I'm reading you wrong, but I'm usually good at judging this kind of thing."

"No, no, you're not wrong," Eddie said, pulling it in close.

"Figured! No offense, but you don't look like our usually clientele. What brings you in tonight?"

"One of the comics you have on. Someone at work was insisting, very loudly, that everyone had to go see Richie Tozier, and I guess I just got curious."

"Oh, Rich!" she said with laugh. "Yeah, he's a good one. Lucky for him, or the boss would have killed him."

"What, was he paid too much to fail?" Eddie asked, pulling another laugh out of her.

"Oh God no, he would have been dead regardless then. Nah, the guy's just been visiting New York for a few weeks, and he turned up one day going 'Hey, I want to try out my act on a new crowd, here's some sites where you can find reviews about me to see I've got good buzz, do you have any open sets coming up?' And those reviews made him out to be just, like, this huge comic dynamo on the rise out in Chicago, and when he did a few bits for the boss to show him his chops he might not have been *that* incredible, but he did make him laugh and, hey, some folks only really come on in front of a crowd. So he worked him into a few spots in the schedule.

"I'm sorry, I don't see how this could be leading to anyone trying to kill anyone," Eddie told her. "It sounds as if you were lucky he chose your club."

"It does, doesn't it? At least until someone with a little more internet savvy than the boss decided to check out those reviews and realized that none of the other links on the pages actually went anywhere. And, after searching for them, that none of the reviewers actually seemed to exist. Or, for that matter, their papers or the clubs he was supposed to have performed in. The clever bastard had set up some bullshit pages to make it look like he wasn't a complete amateur, and

we figured it out too late to find a replacement before his first show.” She shook her head, eyes alight with some mix of disbelief and admiration, the smile on her face only growing. “A move like that’s only going to end up getting told one of two ways; either in ten years the boss would be talking about the brass balls on him while bragging about getting him on in his early days, or else the next morning he’d have been complaining to anyone who’d listen about the no-talent con who ruined the night.”

Eddie consider it for a minute and said, “There’s got to be a third option, right? If he was good enough not to embarrass you but nothing special.”

“Oh, newbie, no. If that were the case the story would never get told at all.” She looked past him, at where another couple of earlybirds were finally starting to come up behind him, and waved him in. “Welp, thanks for stopping to chat at this most boring part of my night, but looks like I’ve gotta do some actual work again. Enjoy the show, and try not to look so nervous about it! We’re a comedy club, not a biker bar, nobody’s gonna bite you. You might even find out you like it.”

“Yeah, maybe,” Eddie said, trying not to sound doubtful. “Thanks for the, uh,” he popped the candle at her as he stepped past, then glanced around. “I’ll just go find a seat.”

He considered the coat check but quickly decided he’d rather keep his things with him. The one member of staff he’d encountered might have seemed decent enough, but he’d had to put too fucking much money he wasn’t yet making enough to afford into getting a few suits that looked high-end enough to make a good impression in his company, and he wasn’t going to risk losing a jacket if the kid taking coats turned out to be untrustworthy. Instead he veered towards the bar, opening his mouth to rattle off the list of foods that Myra and his mother before her both insisted he needed to watch out for, only to have his attention caught by Rich Tozier’s name appearing once again on the set list propped up behind the counter. Somehow what came out in the moment of distraction was, “I’ll have a pint of whatever’s good on tap, please. And a platter of nachos.”

Somewhere in the back of his mind a usually silenced voice was

saying ‘Dude, you were once goaded into eating an entire block of Velveeta on a dare. You don’t have issues with cheese.’ Even the rest of his brain pointing out that often lactose intolerance didn’t develop until adulthood, and that a vague childhood memory from so long ago that he could no longer pick out the details didn’t say anything about the present, wasn’t enough to silence it.

“The nachos are made for splitting,” the bartender said, glancing at the obvious lack of companions around Eddie but not actually sounding especially interested in whether he planned to gorge himself or not. “Sure you want them?”

Eddie grinned at him suddenly, wide and toothy, and said, “No, I plan on finishing them all myself. You wouldn’t believe the craving I have all of a sudden.”

The bartender gave him a look like he thought Eddie had to be high, but shrugged anyway and poured him his beer. “Come back up in fifteen for the food,” he said as he tendered him out. “Servers aren’t up yet.”

The actual tables scattered around the stage were still mostly unoccupied, the rest of the scant few early customers sticking close to the bar while there wasn’t anything happening, so Eddie was free to take whatever spot he wanted. His usual instinct would be to find a quiet spot in the back (though he quickly realized that Alicia at the door had been telling the truth when she’d said the place was too small to have any real ‘back’, the tables were all either close to the stage, or slightly further away but still close to the stage), but instead Eddie found himself veering for a seat the was off to one side but still so close that if a performer wanted to they could jump straight onto it. He jammed his candle down like he was staking a claim, and settled in to wait.

Eddie still didn’t know why, but when this Rich Tozier appeared he wanted a good look at him.

The one thing he didn’t expect was that Rich Tozier would want a good look at him in return. Why would he, when Eddie knew damned well that he wasn’t the type of man people looked at, ever, period.

Not unless ‘What is this weirdo freaking out about’ was written all over their face at least.

He walked out on stage and that unrecognizably strange part of Eddie that had been pushing Eddie all though the night took him in—the hair that looked like he’d just dragged his fingers through it a few times after rolling out of bed and left it like that, the glasses that he could have stolen off someone’s grandpa, the clothing that still looked suitcase-rumpled—and went *‘Yeah. That’s exactly what he should look like.’*

Before he could even try to process that reaction Tozier’s eyes, which had been sweeping slowly over the crowd like he was trying to judge the mood as he made his way to the mic, settled on Eddie and he came to a stop so quickly that he almost stumbled over his own feet, just staring. Eddie tried to tell himself that he couldn’t possibly actually be looking at *him*, except that his wide eyes were looking straight into Eddie’s own and there was no was to deny it.

It felt to Eddie like they had to have been staring at each other for an awkwardly long time, but when Rich shook himself out of whatever spell had grabbed them the club was still playing the same walk-on music it had for the two previous acts and the rest of the audience weren’t making any noises like they’d noticed anything unusual happening. But even after pulling himself together he kept looking at Eddie, the smile that had been plastered on his face since he hit the stage taking on a slightly manic edge as he sauntered over the side until he was standing close enough that if Eddie just shifted to the other side of the table he could have reached out to grab his ankle. “Mind if I grab one of those?” he asked, gesturing towards the plate of nachos without actually looking away from Eddie’s face. “I totally skipped lunch, and it looks like you’ve got enough to spare.”

Eddie waved towards them in a help-yourself gesture, but when Rich knelt down and reached out from the stage for his table he said quietly enough that no one else could overhear, “Great save, asshole, this totally doesn’t look weird at all now.”

Rich bit out a laugh and his grin grew edgier still, almost more a grimace, as he worked a laden chip free of the pile. Eddie knew he should be disgusted by a stranger grabbing his food with bare hands,

but somehow it didn't really bother him this time. "I don't know what the fuck is going on with me, man, sorry."

"No, I get it," Eddie told him, their eyes meeting again, and he knew he probably looked just as shell-shocked but was saved a little by the fact that he always looked a little freaked out. It was his natural state. The chip came free, the excuse for them to talk this closely slipping away with it, and before Rich could stand up again he added in a breathless rush, "Hey, Richie... I mean, Rich, sorry, I thought I'd be able to finish these but was completely wrong, so feel free to come over and stuff your face when you're done. If you want."

For just a second he seemed to freeze, then gave one quick, tight, nod before pulling himself back to the stage and making his way to the microphone at last. When he turned back to the crowd his smile was easy again, stage-face neatly back on. "Man, don't skip meals, kids, or you'll find yourself lunging at strangers for their munchies," he said popping the chip he'd taken into his mouth. It wasn't much of a joke, but still earned a laugh as the crowd accepted it as a sign that whatever weirdness had started his set was being left behind and the jokes were beginning.

Eddie leaned back to take in his show, but before he could get too comfortable a concerned voice said, "Was whatever that was all about okay?" and he looked up to see Alicia from the door hovering over him. "Tozier knows the code, he shouldn't have been bugging you."

"No, no! It's okay!" he waved her off. Lying had never come easily to him, but in his desire not to get Rich in trouble for whatever the hell had just happened one suddenly flew easily as truth off his tongue, "We used to know each other, that's why I came to see him. I didn't know for sure it'd be the same guy until he walked out on stage, but there you go. He was just saying hi when he recognized me."

She didn't look like she entirely bought it, but she pulled away regardless. "Well, alright then. I'll tell the boss he doesn't need to tear him a new one for bothering you, if you're sure."

"Yeah, I'm sure," Eddie told her, half wanting to snap that he wouldn't fucking bullshit about being fine but twisting his tongue

towards politeness instead, “Thanks for the concern.” Then he finally let his attention turn fully towards the show.

He didn’t know whether he was more surprised or pleased to see that Rich was still shooting glances his way on almost every other line.

2. Discover What You Set Out To Find

Eddie honestly thought that their short exchange of words would end up being it. Rich might have agreed to come over after his set, but Eddie'd had enough experiences back in college with people who were supposedly definitely going to meet up with him later, seriously, only to never show again. Even when, at least as far as he could see, Eddie hadn't yet done anything too obviously weird to cause it. A two-second exchange might have been quick even for him to inexplicably drive someone off, but it was also quick to expect anyone to actually want to spend any time with him.

A half-hour had passed since the set and Eddie was just starting to think about giving up and leaving when Rich suddenly slipped into the seat beside him, grabbing a chip without preamble. "I actually seriously did skip lunch, so thanks for not letting them clear your table dude."

"Yeah, well, they warned me it was too much for one person, but I haven't eaten that sort of shit in years and thought the novelty would be enough to keep me going." He tried his best to sound normal, and thought he succeeded. It was hard when it felt like there was an elastic band stretched between the two of them, the tension eased somewhat now that they were sitting right beside one and other but still trying to snap them together. "Uh, by the way, I'm Edward. Eddie. Eddie Kasprak."

Rich had been watching him closely as he talked, but now eyes skittered away like he'd realize he was staring. He hid it by leaning casually back in his chair, a lazy smile stretching across his face, but Eddie felt sure he'd read the action right. "Now do I go for the obvious stupid bad joke..." he mused, his chair creaking back onto two legs in a way that made Eddie flinch and instinctively hook an ankle around one of the front legs and yank it down again before he could crack open his head.

Rich blinked at Eddie in response, but, fuck it, he wasn't the only one who could try to pretend they weren't acting weirdly. Eddie blustered ahead without acknowledging that his foot was still holding Rich's chair in place, just in case, "I literally *just* watched you perform, man.

You're not gonna make me believe you've ever passed up on a stupid joke."

"Hey, fuck you too!" Rich said with an easy laugh in reply, not appearing offended in the least. Which was good since Eddie wasn't actually *trying* to be a prick, it just slipped easily out of him on the same impulse that had made him call Rich an asshole as the very first thing he'd said to him. "You're gonna have to sit further back from the stage next time if you want to pretend you weren't laughing at my jokes, Edward Eddie Eddie Kaspbrak."

Eddie rolled his eyes and shook his head, but he couldn't say he hadn't asked for it. "Just 'Eddie' will do fine, Richie."

"Huh." Richie said, his smile fading into something a little more thoughtful as he grabbed some more nachos. "You called me that earlier too."

"What?" Eddie thought back on the past few seconds then swore quietly, his fingers tapping harshly on the tabletop as he tried to figure out why he fuck his tongue kept getting away from him. "Shit. Sorry. Rich. I don't know why I keep wanting to—"

Rich's hand clamped down heavily over Eddie's wrist, stopping his own hand from jittering. Eddie had never been much for touching... anyone, really, but somehow that contact was warm and comforting even as it was snatched away again almost as fast as it had happened, Rich's eyes darting somewhere away from him once more. "Hey, you can call me whatever you want. The 'Rich' thing is, uh, market-research I guess? Trying to figure out what I can call myself that works best with an audience." He ran a hand through his hair and flashed Eddie a small smile. "It kinda feels right when you call me Richie. Which is weird, since I'm pretty sure no one but my Gran's called me that since before my balls dropped."

"Do you talk about the state of your balls with everyone you've known for five minutes, or am I just special?" Eddie said before he could stop himself, internally wincing even as the words came out of his mouth because, seriously, it *had* been barely more than five fucking minutes and what sort of thing was that to say to a complete stranger.

But before Eddie could let himself get too worked up about it Richie, his eyes darting wildly behind his glasses like he was making sure no one else was too close, his face flushing in a way it hadn't even when Eddie had heard some filthy fucking shit coming out his mouth up on stage, muttered in a barely audible voice, "I think we can both tell there's something special going on here, right? It's not just me being a complete fucking weirdo?"

There was a faint edge of unexpected fear in Richie's voice that Eddie found he hated to hear and he rushed to reassure him in a voice just as low, "No, it's not just you. I-I hadn't even fucking *seen* you then some asshole at work today was talking about you and I couldn't get your fucking name out of my head." Then he straightened up a little, letting his voice go back to a normal tone as he added, "Well, said 'Rich Tozier' anyway. Richie fits better. I'm pretty sure a guy named 'Rich' would at least brush his fucking hair before getting on stage in front of a roomful of people." Eddie raised his hand as he spoke, starting to reach out to ruffle his hand through that hair before just letting it drop instead. That would have been too much, wouldn't it? Too sudden.

But he didn't miss the way Richie's eyes tracked his hand the entire time he was moving it, or the way that a faint worry in his expression flashed into disappointment for just a moment when it never made contact. He said nothing about it though, just let himself relax back in his chair again with a laugh as he accepted Eddie's change of topic. "Nah, dude, you're thinking of 'Richard'. Richard Tozier would have to have a *completely* different show, I don't even know *what* that guy would pull out up on stage. He wouldn't fuck as many moms, for one thing." He swiped a swig of Eddie's beer, making Eddie raise his eyebrows and gesture pointedly towards the servers wandering between tables and the bar not that far beyond, but he just snickered and took another drink before pushing the mug back to Eddie. "What did you think of the show anyway?"

Eddie snorted and, after a long suspicious look at his mug, took a quick sip of his own. Just to show he wasn't going to be a complete fucking freak about someone splitting a drink with him. "I mean, I don't know if I'm the best person to ask, but you were pretty funny sometimes."

“Oh, wow, Eds!” Richie exclaimed, theatrically clutching his chest and swaying backwards as if overcome by emotion. “Pretty funny sometimes”? I don’t know if I can stay humble with praise like that, I can feel my ego swelling already.”

“Fuck you too,” Eddie said, flipping him off without any real rancor. “You want to know what a comedy plebe thinks, you have to take it. You were just kinda back-and-forth to me, man. Like, that shit at the beginning, about helping your parents move out here—”

“Uh, yeah, that’s new,” Richie cut in quickly, his expression going shuttered in a way Eddie didn’t understand. “Just something I was playing around with while lugging boxes last week. I get it if it fucking sucks, I haven’t had any time to, uh, polish it yet.”

“No!” Eddie exclaimed, reaching out to grab Richie’s arm before he could think about it, not wanting to see him close off. “Fuck no, Richie, that was some of the funniest shit of the night! You’d tell stories like that and I-I felt like I was seeing the guy I’d felt weirdly compelled to come watch. Then you’d turn around and be spewing some stereotypical fratboy bullshit, and I know that type of crap’s popular right now but it just makes me feel like I’d go rent one of those shitty *American Pie* movies if that’s what I wanted to see. I’d just, like, wait through it for you to sound funny in a real way again.” It was only when the stream of words finished pouring out of him that Eddie realized just how shell-shocked Richie’s stare had become as he watched him speak, and he quickly added, “Though, I mean, I did say I might not be a good person to ask. I know the rest of the crowd was still laughing...”

“I used to be on the radio,” Richie blurted out, and Eddie could only blink at the apparent non sequitur as Richie continued rambling along at an almost breakneck pace, “Like, until last year that’s what I did. That was what I fucking graduated from school thinking I wanted to do, since I didn’t know what complete fucking bullshit it is these days if you aren’t a big name or the station manager. The shit you talk about, the shit you play, your own supposed fucking personality are all decided by a bunch of old farts in a room somewhere. And they were already terrified about *computers* playing music now before Apple ever even came out with its new little toy to make them obsolete, and everything they do is just scrambling to

figure out how to keep people listening. Then last fucking Thanksgiving we did the switch over to all Christmas carols all the time, and two weeks into the break surprised us all with announcement that the station as we'd known it was being shut down and replaced with fucking Nashville radio."

"What the fuck!" Eddie exclaimed, outraged on his behalf. "They seriously fired you over fucking Christmas?"

"Ha, no, I was the only one they offered to shuffle over to a sister station. But I went, fuck it! New dream time, because that one had turned into a giant pile of bullshit!" His leg was bouncing under the table at about a mile a minute and Eddie could feel Richie's arm trembling slightly beneath the hand he still had resting on it as he leaned forward conspiratorially to whisper so no one else could overhear, "And, you know, it seems like already having a built-in audience would be a good thing if you're switching to a job on stage. The agent I found sure thought so! Except it turned out that what that audience wanted to see was Rowdy Rich On Your Ride Home with the radio censorship removed, so I had to go right back out and hunt down a couple of guys from the committee that had created him to keep the crowd happy." For a long moment he closed his eyes, and when he opened them again he covered Eddie's hand with his own and stared at him intently, not showing the skittishness he'd displayed at any other hint of contact. "You think *I'm* fucking funny, Eddie. And you dragged yourself out here in a suit way too classy for this place just because you heard my name. I saw your face and practically fell off the stage and killed myself. And all that shit I just spewed at you isn't something I just *tell* people, you could seriously ruin my career, but you said you only liked the stuff I wrote myself and I just..." He breathed in deeply, his hand squeezing Eddie's, and said, "I still don't know what the hell's going on, but come back to my hotel with me. Don't you think all that shit says you should come with me?"

"Yeah. Yeah, we should do that," Eddie breathed, even though if anyone had asked him when he'd woken up that morning if he would *ever* follow a stranger back to their room after a single conversation he didn't know if he'd even have been able to find words to say how not like him that would be. He hadn't even gone to Myra's apartment

until they'd been dating for a few months, and then only when other people were going to be there for the first few visits. "Wait, *fuck*, no!" he exclaimed with a wince when that thought crossed his mind, then at the look that flashed across Richie's face scrambled to clarify, "No, no, not no to *you*. That's, it's absolutely yes. But, fuck, I need to go break up with my girlfriend first."

Richie reeled back in his seat, breaking off contact between them completely, his expression going flat and blank. "Hey, no need to go too far, man. I'm not trying to uproot your life or anything."

"Hey, fuck that!" Eddie snapped, lashing out to grab to front of his shirt before he could put anymore distance between them. Richie froze there. "I'd never even heard of you a few hours ago, and I already want to go with you more than I've ever wanted to do anything with her. But I'm not a god-damned bastard, I'm not going with you until I've ended things with her." He scrambled for his briefcase, digging out a pen and passing it over to Richie. "Write down where you're staying, I'll be there within an hour. Maybe two if she wants to make things difficult."

Richie stared at the pen for a long moment, and Eddie worried that maybe whatever attack of nerves had grabbed him was keeping its hold. Then he reached out and grabbed Eddie's hand, scrawling an address and a room number across his palm.

"Seriously?" Eddie asked, giving him an unimpressed look. "That's just going to smear, you know. And ink can be fucking toxic if it's absorbed through your skin."

Richie snorted, seeming to relax a little again right in front of Eddie's eyes. "Something tells me that you wouldn't be carrying around a pen that could poison you if it started leaking."

Eddie refused to admit that he had a point, so he just shoved the rest of his beer to him and pushed himself to his feet. "I'll see you soon, Richie. Right?"

"Yeah," Richie said softly. "Yeah, I'll head back and wait for you."